

A personal journey of discoveries through a DIY open course development for professional development of teachers in Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper is the author's exploration into the story behind the development of the pedagogical ideas for the open course around Flexible, Distance and Online Learning (FDOL), its design and implementation, and the opportunities and challenges this presented to the author through three iterations, FDOL131, FDOL132 and FDOL141 during 2013 and 2014.

Flexible, Distance and Online Learning is an open course developed by educational developers in the UK and Sweden for teachers in Higher Education (HE). Formal and informal continuing professional development opportunities are blended to bring higher education teachers from different disciplines, institutions and countries together into a community to learn autonomously or in groups supported by facilitators from different institutions.

Personal discoveries and learning points are shared, based on reflections, observations and related research activities carried out as part of a PhD research project by the author together with a description of the pedagogical design developed for and used in FDOL. Findings shared might be useful for other open course designers who are interested in providing extended, and extending, collaborative learning opportunities for their students through opening-up and joining-up educational provision and practices.

Keywords: Open educational practice, professional development of teachers, open course, Problem-Based Learning

Context

Weller (2014) states that open practice is now mainstream while Wiley and Hilton (2009) noted that Higher Education is still analogue, tethered isolated, generic, students as consumers and the system is closed, while in everyday life we see practices that are digital, mobile, connected, personal, individuals are creators and the system is open. What is the reality today? There are others who realise that there is still some way to go to achieve this (Mulder, 2012 in Zourou, 2013). The European Commission (2013) recognises the importance and value of open and joined-up practices across the European Union to foster collaboration and innovation and support initiatives. Governments in the UK and other countries are also recognising this.

The interest in open practices has increased and there seems to be a shift from Open Educational Resources (OER) to Open Educational Practices (OEP). Especially in the last few years, the birth and explosion of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have contributed significantly to this change but also increased interest in learning and

teaching more generally. Some institutions have engaged more than others while educational pioneers and rebels continue to push the boundaries and experiment with new pedagogical ideas in the open arena. However, open education is not just MOOCs. There is a whole world out there beyond them. Weller (2014, online) reminds us 'Don't replace one mono-culture with another' and that 'The most interesting thing about openness is innovation.' Innovation comes in all shapes and sizes. Zourou (2013, 34) highlights that 'Education is neither only about MOOCs nor about institutional-led OER [...] it is also about OER that are individually produced materials, shareable by practitioners.' It is also about grass-roots open educational practices, grown in 'back gardens if you like, by individuals and small teams, often distributed, who come together thanks to a shared passion, often without resources or funding. Gauntlett (2011) has written about how social media is transforming individuals into globally connected digital creators, some of whom are educators.

While open practices are blurring the boundaries between formal and informal learning (Conole, 2013), informalisation of learning (Redecker et al, 2011) but also formalisation of informal learning, emerging and becoming more widespread. More flexible, collaborative, personalised pedagogical and accreditation models, as well as a more open and lifewide curriculum (Jackson, 2014) are required to respond to these changes.

The author will share in this paper the birth of FDOL, a grass-roots collaborative open creation in an academic development context. FDOL offers informal and formal CPD pathways for teachers in HE and is a course which was developed out of professional curiosity without funding by two academic developers in two different countries. One of them was the author of this paper.

The pedagogical design

The pedagogical design for FDOL was developed to make learning choices and opportunities for autonomous, collaborative and inquiry-based learning fully contextualised to learners' own practice and supported by facilitators. The author recognised the potential to achieve collaborative learning in open settings through exploring the use of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as it is a student-driven pedagogical approach where students learn in groups through inquiry (Savin-Baden, 2003). The author had used online PBL before in an experiment with students studying towards a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education from different institutions. Findings showed that working together in groups was the glue that held individuals together despite the challenges experienced (Nerantzi, 2011a). The author wanted to investigate further if it was just the fact that working together in small groups made a difference or the use of PBL in particular. During a PBL conference in 2011, the author met Lars Uhlin, an educational developer at the Karolinska Institutet in Sweden and together they started collaborating on the development of the FDOL course. Both course developers decided to experiment with PBL in open online settings and developed a simplified PBL model that could support learning in open online groups more naturally, removing some of the additional steps in other PBL models. This led to the development of FISH based on Mills' (2006) 5-step model. FISH stands for Focus-Investigate-Share. The name itself provides a visual hook of the three main steps at the heart of any PBL process. A set of questions were developed to accompany each step

to be used as guidance during PBL activities (see Figure 1). The course developers decided that the initial group size would be 8-9 learners in each group. They estimated, based on extremely low completion rates in other open courses (Parr, 2013), that around 40-50% would never participate or 'disappear' despite their expressed preference during the registration process to work in small groups and be supported by a facilitator.

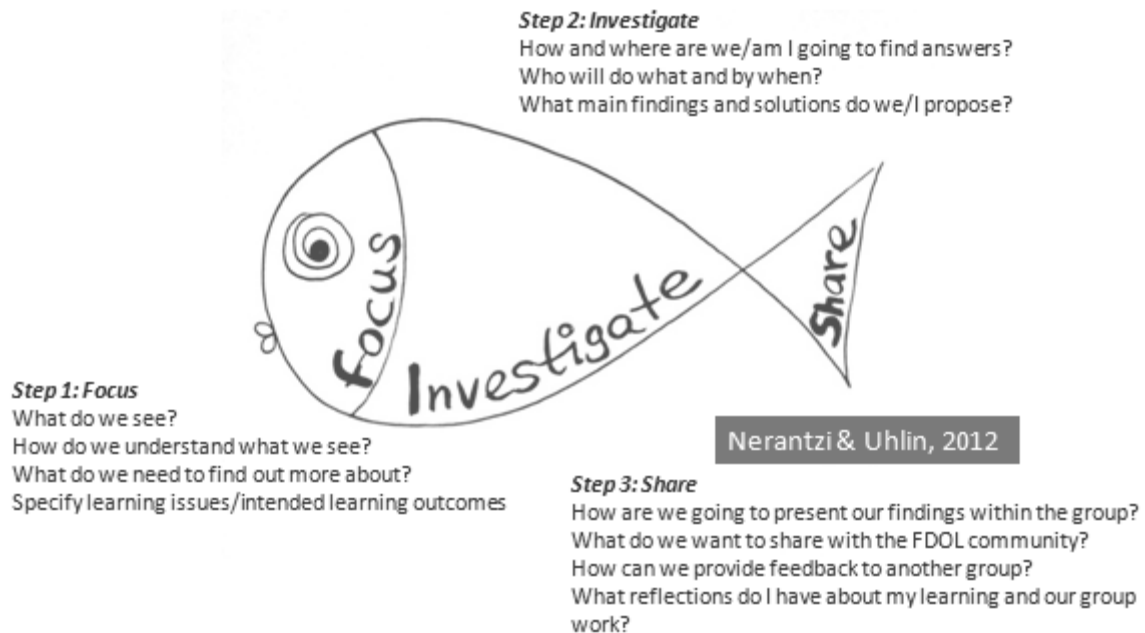


Figure 1. The FISH model (Nerantzi & Uhlin, 2012)

It was suggested to the groups to use FISH but also use PBL roles and rotate these during the course. However, learning in groups using PBL was only part of the pedagogical design. The author and the co-developer felt that it was important to provide multiple and more flexible pathways to engage and meet different learning needs, preferences and opportunities more generally. This idea led to the development of a design for learning that included working in groups using PBL, but also provided the freedom for autonomous and networked learning within and beyond the course boundaries.

During FDOL131, the course first iteration, group membership could be core or peripheral, based on concepts used in Wenger et al's (2009) Communities of Practice and the 'legitimate peripheral participation' which translates into learning opportunities for all independently of where individuals position themselves. The rationale for FDOL131, to distinguish between core and peripheral participation within the PBL groups, was that it could become a mechanism to distinguish levels of commitment from the start that potentially would have an effect on engagement within the groups. This would then enable the group to work more effectively together as activities and tasks could be shared depending on this information. The visualisation below (Figure 2) shows the different modes of participation in FDOL131 and learning choices; from autonomous learner, learning with a study-buddy or small self-organised group, to a facilitated PBL group with core and peripheral members from different

disciplines, institutions and cultures, to external participation to the course groups or individuals. As the course was wide-open and nothing hidden behind password-protected walls, it was possible that individuals and groups who were not registered on the course, could use the course for their learning without engaging at all with the course team and related activities.

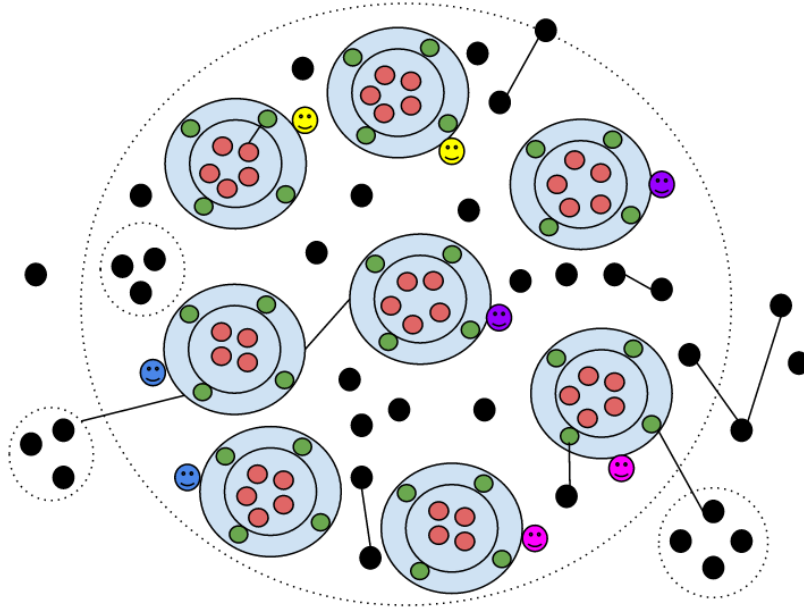


Figure 2. FDOL131 course design Nerantzi & Uhlin (2012), participants are represented using dots and facilitators using smileys

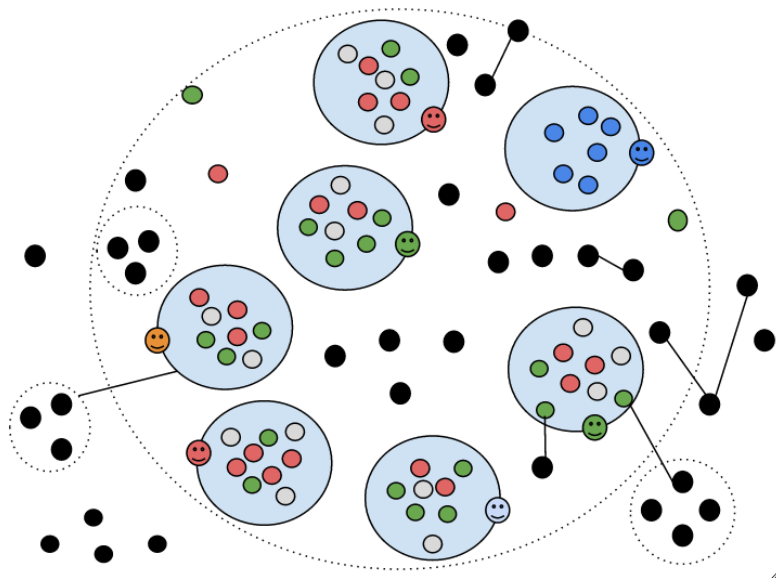


Figure 3. FDOL132 course design Nerantzi, Uhlin and Kvarnström (2013) participants are represented using dots and facilitators using smileys

The model of peripheral and core membership used in FDOL131 did not work in practice as anticipated, in fact it made group formation and participation more challenging and it was therefore agreed to remove this layer of complexity. In subsequent iterations, core group memberships became the only option to participate in PBL activities (see Figure 3).

The different modes of possible participation added flexibility to engagement and learning. The adjustments made to the design in each course iteration were in response to how the design worked in practice and were seen as opportunities for refinement to further simplify the design and structure so that it didn't get in the way.

Social media: Gauntlett (2011, 5) has written about Web 2.0 as an enabler for all and everyone of us with access to the web, to make and share creations much more easily and rapidly with others around the globe but also to collaborate, and he uses the analogy of a 'collective allotment' where all are gardeners and makers. Such an approach, based on a makers' and DIY culture was used to build FDOL. The developers discussed what the purpose of FDOL would be, the design and how it could work. The team did not just want to facilitate a course around Flexible, Distance and Online Learning using PBL but also model a course design and course building process as well as develop course spaces that anybody could create and adapt for their needs using social tools and spaces which are already used to some extent by learners (Sharpe & Beetham, 2010) as part of self-organised learning practices. It was decided to use freely available social media tools that did not require special knowledge or skills. The only institutional technology was Adobe Connect which was used for the webinars. The DIY approach would also provide food for thought to teachers in HE to develop their practice further in the area of technology enhanced learning through active experimentation within a safe and supportive community. The course site was developed using Wordpress.com, and Google+ communities were used as communication and collaboration spaces. Further social media such as Twitter, Google Drive, YouTube, Slideshare, Scoop.it and Diigo were introduced but not all of these were essential to fully participate and the tools were therefore separated into essential (Wordpress, Google+, Google Drive) and optional (Slideshare, Scoop.it, Diigo). Learners were encouraged to use or create a digital portfolio to capture their learning and Wordpress was suggested for this.

The FDOL story

The author played with the idea of openness during her MSc studies in 2010/11 and particularly during the dissertation module. The author set-up a small scale pilot aiming to connect new teachers studying towards a PgCert to gain a teaching qualification in Higher Education (HE) from different institutions. The pilot enabled them to learn more about assessment and feedback using a pedagogical design based on Problem-Based Learning (PBL). While there were a number of challenges, the findings of this pilot captured in Nerantzi (2011a) and related publications (Nerantzi, 2011b; Nerantzi, 2012), confirmed that participating students found it extremely valuable to learn together with colleagues from different disciplines (Parson et al, 2012) and learn together in small PBL groups supported by a PBL facilitator. Participants suggested that creating further opportunities to connect and learn with colleagues from other institutions on similar courses would be valuable for them and help break out of institutional silos and free-up academic development (Nerantzi, 2011b). An added bonus was that some participants in this pilot were able to use their engagement and learning as assessment linked to their PgCert studies at their institutions. This meant that they could gain formal recognition for their informal learning within their own institutions as a result of engaging with this pilot, something that opened new possibilities to the author.

This experiment prompted the exploration of further opportunities to open-up academic development provision and identify meaningful ways to connect not just individual teachers in HE from different institutions but attempt to bring cohorts of students from different disciplines and institutions together. This would be done by creating an open course that would sit outside their institutions but be linked to institutional provision so that participants could work towards credits in their own institutions while at the same time also making it freely available to others who would like to join as part of their informal Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

As that time the author was developing the open Flexible, Distance and Online Learning (FDOL) module while working in the Academic Development Unit at the University of Salford. FDOL was approved locally in July 2011 and became part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice. Unfortunately, after approval, there were new institutional challenges and resistance to offer this module, mainly due to its open pedagogical design and approach. The two course designers used the FDOL module specifications and started developing the open FDOL course in their own time without any funding or support hoping that the situation would change in the near future. The developers based their pedagogical ideas on the author's early PBL pilot and developed together a multifaceted pedagogical model that would enable flexible ways to engage and learn, autonomously and collaboratively, depending on the learner's preferences, time commitment and aspirations. The collaborative features of FDOL were based on a simplified PBL model and process that would enable learners to carry out inquiry and learn collaboratively in small groups while also being supported by a facilitator. The pedagogical design changed and evolved over time. The open FDOL course is a DIY construction. Freely available social media and online spaces were used and the course and all associated learning spaces were built by the course designers without any external help. The FDOL course and its design COOL FISH, see <http://fdol.wordpress.com/> are available under a creative commons attribution non-commercial 3.0 unported licence.

Despite local challenges at the UK institution, the two academic developers continued developing the open course. Desired generic course learning outcomes were formulated, the pedagogical design developed and a scaffold for learning was created. FDOL was structured into learning units each bringing out a specific theme linked to Flexible, Distance and Online Learning. These were initially:

- Unit 1: Orientation
- Unit 2: Introduction to FDOL
- Unit 3: Collaborative learning and communities
- Unit 4: Supporting learning
- Unit 5: Open educational practices
- Unit 6: Celebrating learning

A mix of asynchronous and synchronous activities for autonomous and collaborative learning were developed for each thematic unit that acted as a learning menu to enable multiple personalised learning pathways, depending on learner's own learning goals and priorities. Short video resources and key open access literature were added

to enable further and more critical engagement. For those learning in PBL groups, scenarios were made available. Groups could decide which scenarios they wanted to use throughout the course and were encouraged to use the FISH model for their PBL investigations. A more hands-on approach was initially required by the facilitators. Guest speakers were invited and led regular thematic webinars during the course. All learners were encouraged to actively experiment and reflect on their learning but also to share experiences and develop their thinking and understanding through discussions in the various online spaces. Support was provided to all learners in groups and for autonomous learners.

The above mentioned themes remained important milestones throughout the FDOL journey and its three iterations, FDOL131, FDOL132 and FDOL141 (see below and Figure EE). Digital literacies was a common thread that underpinned all themes but it did become a separate theme from the second iteration of the course (FDOL132), while celebrating learning was integrated into the last unit. The course duration, design, suggested activities, grouping process and group work itself changed from iteration to iteration and with the number of facilitators. Participation in the course was rewarded with a Certificate of Participation which was sent electronically to individual participants shortly after course completion.

What follows are specific details linked to each FDOL iteration and a brief overview of anecdotal evidence linked to the course, the student and facilitators experience from the author's perspective. Preliminary findings linked to FDOL132 which is a case in the PhD research project by the author are also shared.

FDOL131: Agreement was gained by the author's institution, a year after the module was approved, to offer FDOL as a pilot in early 2013 as an informal collaboration between the two developers. This was a breakthrough and enabled the team to make plans to offer the first version of FDOL (FDOL131) over 12 weeks, from February to May 2013. In total there were four educational developers initially involved to support 80 learners. Due to a change in personal circumstances, one facilitator left the course early on. The facilitators were: the author (who, at the time, was working at the University of Salford in the UK) and two colleagues from the Karolinska Institute in Sweden. The majority of learners were from the same countries as the facilitators, UK and Sweden. During the registration process learners were asked for their preference to study during the course 80% of participants preferred to learn within a facilitated group, as core or peripheral members. This highlighted a clear preference or desire for learning with others and being supported by a facilitator. Eight groups were formed to accommodate preference of working in groups and the process of grouping happened manually to secure multi-disciplinary membership, cultural richness, and different levels of familiarity in online learning environments to enable peer support. However, it was quickly observed that this initial rush to join a group might not have reflected the commitment that would be required by the learners to fully participate in group activities. An FDOL131 learner shared the following with the team: 'Since I have been assigned a group I feel that they may have expectations on my attendance. Therefore I have decided not to go on with this very exciting course, unfortunately.' Soon about half of the learners in groups became quiet and started disappearing and groups had

to be merged into four. Groups were merged to enable learners and by unit 3 a more stable pattern of participation was observed.

The last FDOL131 webinar provided valuable insights into the experience during the pilot as learners shared their thoughts and experiences linked to this. This enabled the collection of anecdotal evidence which, together with facilitators' reflections and observation, enabled the team to carry out a preliminary evaluation of the pilot. Overall, learners noted that the course was useful for their practice despite the challenges they experienced, mainly due to the technology, the multiple platforms and initially feeling lost and disorientated. At the end of the course they felt that the course was valuable for them and helped them develop as practitioners in the digital age. As time progressed, learners stated that they felt part of the community and valued learning with others in small groups. Learners realised that seeing the other person in Google hangouts and webinars made a real difference and helped create a sense of belonging when working within groups that also acted as a motivator for learning and increased commitment to continue and persist. An FDOL131 learner for example noted: 'The synchronous webinar and hangout sessions have fostered a real sense of being part of a community of learners.' It was also noted that the support facilitators provided was vital for learning. An identity at course level was absent as interactions between the groups was extremely limited and opportunities for richer exchange and peer review were under-used. Learners who completed the course were all PBL group members. Trust was an important ingredient in developing relationships. One FDOL131 learner stated: 'Learning online is all about trust. Trusting tutors, peers, the learning environment, the learning approaches.'

Before offering the course again, learners' and course team's comments were taken into consideration to make modifications to the course design and structure. The major change was linked to group membership. The plan was to simplify and the option to be a peripheral member would be removed as this was something that did not seem to work at all in FDOL131 and added unnecessary complexity for grouping and group work.

FDOL132: FDOL132 was offered over 12 weeks from the 12th September to the 5th December 2013 and attracted a total of 107 participants, 65 from the UK, 20 from Sweden and 22 from other countries around the world. 22 participants (31%) of the total number of registrations expressed interest to work in groups and four groups were formed which were reduced to three as the course progressed, in response to participant drop-out. FDOL132 was offered with four facilitators, three of whom worked on FDOL131 and one new facilitator who was a learner on FDOL131 was invited to join the facilitators' team.

Beyond the group changes mentioned above, a unit around Digital Literacies was added, bringing the total number of units to seven (7). FDOL132 would be the first time the course would be used by 2 institutional teams with students on different credit-bearing courses. The groups had to be changed early during this course. This was due to the author's relocation to a new post at a different institution early on during the research, which meant that many of the UK groups in this course were unable to continue. The course discussion space peaked at the beginning and then was

used less until course completion. Discussions there were extremely limited. The main activities were observed in the PBL groups, similar to FDOL131.

The 'giant hangout' at the end, as it was called by a learner, started painting a picture of the learners' experience in FDOL132. In common with FDOL131 learners, the technology once again presented a significant challenge but learners stated that it became progressively easier and more manageable as they became more familiar with the different spaces and understood how they were connected. Time was also a major challenge for learners and conflicting priorities in their professional and private lives. Different working practices in groups were mentioned that highlighted the need for further flexibility in group work and confirmed that one size does not fit all. Some groups preferred working asynchronously, others synchronously, and others adopted a mixed approach. Many found it frustrating to wait for responses referring to the online discussions but despite all the challenges they experienced within the groups all felt that FDOL132 was a useful experience and recognised the value of group work. One FDOL132 learner said for example: 'It is really cool to learn together' and another one noted 'It feels like that community buzz has been created amongst colleagues in this course, but across geographical boundaries'. Another learner stated the following: 'I registered for the first FDOL131 course, but I didn't get a grip of the course and felt a bit lost. There was a lot of information but I felt it was a mountain to climb and that I was quite alone (there was no room left in any PBL groups). So I dropped out. I'm glad I gave it a second chance, this time in a PBL group which has been a strong motivator for continuing the course.' It was also noted that working in smaller groups was more effective and that the Google hangouts were really useful to connect with others and made the experience more personal. For some, FISh was a useful model for group learning. Overall, it was recognised that the facilitators' support was instrumental for their learning and also valued the more interactive parts of the experience. Participants in this webinar noted that FDOL132 has enabled them to reflect on their practice, experiment with different technologies, some of which triggered changes to specific practices and helped them develop new competencies. For example, one FDOL132 learner noted: 'It is great to try something new, I have never used Google+ communities before but I already have some ideas for activities.' Learning in FDOL132 was a scaffold to move responsibility of learning to the learners. One learner noted regarding this 'I must say, the FDOL course I'm taking now really gives most of the control to the learners, and I've appreciated that quite a lot (although it is quite challenging).'

FDOL132 became the first case of the author's ongoing PhD research project in open education with a special focus on collaborative learning in academic development. Consent was secured from 19 FDOL132 participants who volunteered to participate in the study. A more thorough analysis will be possible as the author's PhD research continues.

What follows is a preliminary evaluation of the data collected using semi-structured phenomenographical interviews and two survey instruments linked to FDOL132. There are 19 participants in this study.

The initial survey was completed by 17 individuals and showed that 37% were from the UK, 37% from Sweden and 26% from other countries. 82% of participants were between 35 and 54 years of age, 65% of whom were female and 35% male. 53% hold a doctoral qualification, 35% a postgraduate qualification up to MA level and 12% have an undergraduate degree. All were employed, 88% in HE and 12% in the Public Sector. 88% had previous experience of participating in online courses and 47% had participated in open online courses before. Regarding their experience, 77% stated that they had worked in groups, 50% had used social media in a professional capacity, 38% had experience of collaborating online and 30% have used PBL. The main reasons to join FDOL132 were to be an open learner, to connect with others, to collaborate, to be supported by a facilitator and the application of learning to practice.

The final survey was completed by participants in this study shortly after course completion. In total 11 out of 19 completed the survey, 91% of whom learned within a PBL group and 9% were autonomous learners. 55% of participants studied on average 3 hours per week, 27% about 5 hours and 18% over 5 hours per week. The main reason stated for non-participating in a specific aspect of the course is time. The main learning goals mentioned were, using technologies for learning, experiencing PBL, learning in groups, open learning and open course design. All participants confirmed that they met their personal learning outcomes fully. When asked what they found most valuable for their learning, they stated the following features: a structured course; the provision of a variety of synchronous and asynchronous opportunities to engage; that there was flexibility; resources; ongoing communication; feedback from facilitators; peers and others; recognition for their study and group work, despite the fact that the latter was often a struggle. Regarding facilitation, 100% were satisfied with the facilitators support and their presence in online discussions. 64% were satisfied with the regularity of feedback provided by the facilitators.

Both surveys were useful to start drawing a profile of participants and provided some information linked to their experience on the course and their perceived achievements. Figure 4 shows where and to what extent there is a shift in importance of specific features for learning. Initially all participants agreed that group work, independent study and facilitator support were of value for their learning. The final survey revealed that independent study and facilitator support were valued to the same degree at the end of the course, while group work went down. A further shift was also observed in the importance of feedback and recognition for study. The initial survey showed that feedback and recognition for study were of less significance for learners, while the final survey revealed that these figures increased. These changes could be interpreted as showing how challenges experienced when learning in groups made learners re-think the effectiveness of group work. The conceptual shift observed here about the importance of feedback and recognition for study in open learning courses is also seen as significant as learners recognised that they worked hard and felt that they needed more acknowledgement for their efforts during the course but also a recognition for their studies and their achievements at the end.






what participants valued for their learning	initial survey	final survey	
group work	100%	74%	
feedback	61%	97%	
recognition for study	47%	94%	
independent study	100%	100%	
facilitator support	100%	100%	

Figure 4. Features important for learning at the start and at the end of FDOL132

Rich insight into the variation of the learners' experience was gained through the individual interviews which were conducted remotely using Skype and transcribed manually. Seven interviews in total translated into 37,274 words which will need to be analysed and categories to be formed together with the data to be collected from two additional case studies, according to phenomenography, the methodology used. The very first findings from FDOL132 are shared here.

Participants in the study stated that their main motivations to participate in FDOL132 were to be an open learner, to learn more about PBL, to engage in CPD, and to learn to use technology-enhanced learning approaches in their practice. Learners noted that they felt overwhelmed at the start and used words and phrases such as 'big wave', 'chaos', 'ah, panic, panic', 'it all hits you at once', 'confused', 'frustrated' and 'overwhelmed' to describe how they felt initially. Participant C1 normalised the complexity experience during the course and stated:

'For me, it [...] was kind of being part of the complexity, actually [...] when I was looking at that diagram with all the different communities and the arrows and things, and I thought 'wow that's complex'. It's quite complex to get your head 'round [...] to begin with. And [...] I don't have a problem with that, because actually, [...] what it reiterates for me is that learning is complex.[...] 'If you're gonna prepare people for complexity then prepare them for complexity and put them in complex situations. [...]. If we can have some degree of controlled anarchy and, and some controlled chaos which is done in a reasonably, [...] safe environment, I think that much better prepares learners in the twenty first century than [...] prescribed curricula.'

These feelings progressively seem to become milder and working in groups made their experience more manageable and personal despite the challenges. The biggest challenge that all participants experienced throughout was time and conflicting priorities with work, development and personal life. All participants who were

interviewed recognised the value of learning in a group especially with individuals from different disciplines and cultures. Some highlighted that the different level of commitment of group members, but also personality and cultural differences, presented difficulties to them. As there were some group members who were working towards credits, this seemed to have a positive impact on the whole group and acted as a motivator. The assessment for learners working towards credits was based on personal reflections and not linked to the PBL activity. This presented a challenge for these learners to collaborate fully in group work. Some stated also that they felt that the quality of the group work was below acceptable standards and that too much focus was given on the product instead of the process. However, despite all the challenges, all agreed that working in smaller groups worked better for them and made the experience personal. Seeing each other and working together during Google hangouts made a big difference. They also valued the webinars as these were highly interactive. However, it was a challenge to participate in all of them because of time. Facilitators' presence and active participation in discussions made a real difference to participants. Overall they felt that FDOL132 was a valuable and positive experience for professional development that enabled them also to apply at least some of what was learnt to their practice. Participant F5, for example noted: 'I would recommend that they go on the course. From the perspective of trying to view open learning in a different way and, and viewing how we manage educational development provision to colleagues in a different way, in a more flexible way. [...] I think they would find it useful as a framework for reflection on their own practice or planning for future practice.' Similar views are echoed in all participants' interviews.

FDOL141: FDOL141 was offered over 6 weeks from the 10th February to the 23rd March 2014 and attracted in total 86 participants, 38 from the UK, 27 from Sweden and 21 from other countries around the world. It was possible for learners from the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and the Karolinska Institutet to study towards academic credits. Colleagues from the Karolinska Institutet took this opportunity. Assessment requirements were defined and arranged by this institution and were dealt with separately.

Four major changes were made in preparation for this iteration:

- (1) The course duration was halved compared to the two previous iterations. The course team wanted to explore if a shorter course would influence engagement and momentum as time was mentioned often as an inhibitor to participate more fully.
- (2) Group membership shifted away from being a facilitator-led activity. Learners were responsible for joining a group if they felt that this was their preferred way of learning during the course. Six group spaces were set-up at the start and learners were self-registering in these.
- (3) Webinars with external speakers organised by the course team were removed from this iteration. The idea was that some of the facilitators and learners could organise their own smaller scale events through using Google hangouts or other technology which would potentially lead to increased ownership of course activities and enable them to lead and participate in activities of their choice and make the experience more

interactive and personal as only a small number of individuals would be able to participate in these.

(4) The facilitation team increased from 4 to 14 facilitators in total. There was no way of knowing in advance how many learners would register as there were no restrictions in how many could sign up. However, numbers from previous iterations provided a useful guide. In the end, 86 learners registered for the course and the core course team decided to work with all colleagues who had expressed interest in joining the facilitators' team despite the relatively conservative registration numbers by using a buddy system and also sharing responsibilities and tasks. Colleagues who joined the facilitators' team were academic developers but also academics and other professionals in different disciplines and were from the UK and Sweden. Not all were from an HE environment. FDOL141 became a significant CPD opportunity for colleagues in this aspect and enabled experience of an open course as facilitator. For many it was their very first time in such a role. This CPD opportunity was more important to the author than perhaps the disproportionate ratio between learners and facilitators, which meant that there was one facilitator for each seven learners, something that would be seen as a luxury in other educational settings. Some of the new facilitators had completed previous iterations of FDOL as learners. This shows the belief that at least some learners had in the method. FDOL141 was no longer just about the learning and development of participants but also provided the space to help a number of colleagues develop as open facilitators and build capacity in this area.

What follows are personal reflections and observations linked to FDOL141 made shortly after course completion and which were of significance to the author. Further analysis is required to arrive at more informed conclusions.

- For the first time since the launch of the FDOL course, activity in the main Google+ community was sustained throughout the course and exchanges happened initially supported by some of the facilitators but progressively they were mainly by the learners themselves. Learners shared useful resources and blog posts and started off conversations in their personal learning spaces. The majority of participants, 76 in total, signed up in the Google + community. As not all learners registered on the course it is difficult to establish a clear percentage. In total 86 individuals registered for the course.
- A number of learners from the Karolinska Institutet took the opportunity to study towards academic credits. The assessment was individual and based on personal reflection on the course themes. As many of these learners also participated in the PBL groups this seemed to present a challenge. Increased and regular sharing of personal reflections in group spaces and the main course community were observed. While these extended opportunities for further conversation and exchange in the course topics and were beneficial, there was also the potential of these to distract from PBL activities, unless the sharing and discussion of personal reflections was agreed within the groups and became part of the collaborative learning practice within the PBL group.
- PBL was used in its broadest sense for collaborative group learning and bore little resemblance to traditional PBL. The FISH model was used in some cases for

individual and group inquiry with mixed results. Some groups adopted different working practices that might have been more appropriate to their context and were a result of pressure of individual assessment, as mentioned above, shorter course duration, but also lack of familiarity with PBL and different facilitation preferences and approaches.

- The increased number of volunteer facilitators presented an additional complexity. A buddy system was implemented to enable educators with some experience in open settings to work with colleagues who were new to this way of working so that they could share experiences and support each other but also share the facilitation load. Observational evidence suggests that this worked in most cases. The facilitators' private Google+ community provided a useful space to share thoughts, challenges and support each other. Also, while regular meetings were suggested, the team got together only twice within the course.
- This iteration of FDOL, due to a much larger team than previously, highlighted the need for clear leadership, direction, definition of roles and responsibilities and broad agreement from the outset as well as clear communication throughout a course among the core and extended team to enable smooth and quick decision making and working within a supportive and positive atmosphere.
- Overall, learners were very positive about the course and found it useful as a space to experiment with new pedagogies and tools but also come together in a distributed community and share experiences. As in previous iterations, there were challenges with the distributed spaces and time to familiarise with the each other and the course.

Course	FDOL131	FDOL132	FDOL141
Course duration	11Feb – 7 May 13 12 weeks	12 Sep – 5 Dec 13 12 weeks	10 Feb - 23 March 14 6 weeks
Thematic units	6	7	6
Learners	80	107	86
Learners from the UK	42	65	38
Learners from Sweden	21	20	27
Learners from other countries	17	22	21
Groups	8>4	4>3	6>4
Learners in groups/%	64/80%	31/29%	27/32%
Facilitators	4>3	4	14>11 (in pairs/threes)
Learners per facilitator	27	36	7 or 14 (in pairs)
Learners that completed in groups	16	13	17
Completion rate based on the whole cohort	insufficient information	insufficient information	insufficient information
Completion rate based on group participation	25%	43%	63%

Figure 5. Quantitative initial data linked to FDOL131, FDOL132, FDOL141 ('>' means reduced to during the course)

Conclusions

FDOL has been a worthwhile experiment and journey of discovery for everyone involved as well as open collaborative learning design, course development and practice. There have been multiple benefits and challenges for all involved; developers, facilitators and learners.

The evidence gathered from all three FDOL iterations has shown that working in small groups in open courses on authentic learning activities was beneficial and brought individuals together and made their experience more personal and meaningful. It also seemed to increase motivation, commitment and engagement. The role of the facilitator has been vital in overcoming some of the initial challenges especially during group formation but also to support learning later on when needed. While facilitation has been an enormous and sustained effort by volunteer facilitators and was resource intensive, it was also a valuable professional development activity for the facilitators. The main challenges identified were initially the digital tools used and navigation in the distributed spaces, but also to make time for the course, both for learners and facilitators.

Sharing experiences and developing trust within the groups and the wider course community enabled individuals to experiment with pedagogical ideas and tools in their own practice and reflect on their learning. The result was a mix of learning choices that were authentic, personalised and collaborative as well as driven by the learners themselves. Some learners had the opportunity to study formally towards credits and many others informally within a cross-institutional cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural open community and a course for teachers in HE.

The FDOL experiment has come to an end for the author. For her, this was an opportunity to play with pedagogical ideas linked to PBL in collaboration with colleagues from her own and other institutions and cultures. The time has come to release a stable version of FDOL to the wider community and enable the re-use, re-mixing and re-purposing of this open course for other audiences, locally or more distributed. The author's research journey linked to FDOL, especially FDOL132, will continue and data gathered will be added to the 'pot' of case studies and provide a useful insight into the learner experience towards creating a framework for collaborative open online learning in an academic development context. As part of her research she will continue exploring different ways that enable collaborative learning in open settings and study the learner experience as it is lived.

Opening-up and joining-up courses but also taking advantage of informal CPD opportunities in the area of professional development for teachers in HE, will provide richer learning and teaching experiences. It makes extended collaboration and personalisation possible but also enables teachers in HE to experience open educational practices as learners first before organising their own open learning adventures with their students. There are now real opportunities thanks to the digital tools and the ease to use these to connect individuals and groups, thoughts and ideas, information and experiences. What we need is to develop flexible and versatile

pedagogical models to take full advantage of the opportunities we are presented with and engage a wider variety of learners. This can be achieved through grass-roots funded and non-funded collaborative projects and active experimentation within and beyond institutional walls. Let's be resourceful and creative in finding ways to identify valuable open learning solutions for the future!

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Key Pedagogic Thinkers

Anton Makarenko

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Abstract

This article gives an introduction to the life and work of the Ukrainian social pedagogue and educational theorist Anton Makarenko. In the early part of the 1920s, he formulated a theory that he further developed while helping orphans under the most difficult and dramatic conditions. When he died, aged only 51 years old, Makarenko left behind a multifaceted theory, or a system of theories, that deals with many aspects of social pedagogy. Unfortunately, this source is ignored by most professionals in the Western countries. Those embarking on this substantial body of work will experience exciting reading. Most likely they will also acquire new insights and perspectives, which may be useful when trying to help young people.

Makarenko's theory is directly inspired by his background and life experiences. In order to fully understand and thereby be able to assess his texts one needs thorough insight into the difficult political and social conditions under which he lived. The initial